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Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Dec., 1993, Vol. 75, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), pp. 563-582

Published by: CAA

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Why Cylinder Seals?

Engraved Cylindrical Seal Stones of the Ancient Near East, Fourth to First Millennium B.C.

Edith Porada

Cylinder seals, the small spool-shaped objects of the ancient Near East (Fig. 1), are remarkably revealing of the people who made and used them in the thousands of years of their existence, from about 3500 B.C. to the fifth century B.C. Each seal was usually made of stone and engraved with a design that appears in relief when the object is rolled over an impressionable material like clay. Because clay dries in the air and hardens completely, the impression of the design engraved on the cylinder was therefore used for sealing—that is, as a means of securing goods kept behind doors or in jars, boxes, or baskets. Of course, such sealings served their purpose only within a community in which people feared the consequences of an infringement of the sealings. Such disciplined communities existed by the seventh millennium B.C.

Cylinder seals were not the first seals devised by people of the Near East. The earliest seal stones of northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia are stamp seals, one of which, datable about 6500 B.C., has a shape interpreted as phallic (Fig. 2).¹ Furthermore, a large number of pendants from northern Mesopotamia and northern Syria were shaped to symbolize the lower body of a woman in the manner of contemporary clay figurines (Figs. 3a and b).² Such forms suggest that the early seals had an amuletic significance. This significance, based on the stones from which the seals were made as well as on the designs engraved upon them, remained intrinsic to cylinders until they ceased to be used, in the late first millennium B.C.

The cylindrical shape appeared in about 3500 B.C. at the early urban site of Uruk (biblical Erech) in southern Mesopotamia³ and at the contemporary site of Susa in southwestern Iran. The reasons for this development are problematic since stamp seals are more easily impressed on lumps of clay used to close the mouths of jars or other containers (Fig. 4) than are cylinder seals.⁴ Cylinder seals effectively cover a somewhat larger surface, however, such as a clay tablet. On the

tablet from Uruk reproduced here (Figs. 5a and b) signs were written on one side and the cylinder seal was rolled on the other. On other tablets the cylinder was rolled first and then signs—numerals at first—were scratched over the impressions. This implies that writing and cylinder seals were developed at the same time.

The earliest cylinder seal published from Uruk (Fig. 6) is very large and necessitated a bigger piece of stone than was needed for a stamp seal, which could have been fashioned from any pebble picked up from a river. The alluvial country of Mesopotamia lacks good stone for carving; hence the large stones of early cylinders were imported. These stones were brought in together with even larger stones used for the fine stone vessels, the contemporary production of which may have been connected with that of the cylinder seals.⁵ The importation of stones, probably from Iran,⁶ is a manifestation of the extensive commerce of Uruk with other regions that developed in the second half of the fourth millennium B.C.⁷

In contrast with the circle or square of the sealing surface of a stamp seal (Fig. 4), in which the figured designs were usually limited to very few forms, the cylinder presented an extended rectangle on which the design could be composed to return upon itself and thereby produce an unlimited row of figures. The shape of the frieze created by the rollings of cylinders influenced compositions in other media in the art of Mesopotamia and the other countries that adopted cylinder seals.

The early cylinder from Uruk (Fig. 6)⁸ was engraved with a bow drill, the same kind of mechanically operated tool used to bore the perforation for the suspension hole of the cylinder. The drill created baggy, rounded forms in contrast with the thin, linear designs often scratched with a pointed graver on stamp seals (Fig. 4, impression on the right). The subjects in Figure 6 are rows of the same figure. There is also a human figure whose relation to the animals cannot be determined.

The writer wishes to acknowledge help on the photography of the seal impressions by David Loggie, photographer of the Pierpont Morgan Library, and on the oversize enlargements by Terry Dolin of Modern age.

¹ A. von Wicked, *Praehistorische Stempelglyptik in Vorderasien* (*Munchener vorderasiatische Studien*, vi, 1990), provides an excellent introduction to the field.

² Von Wicked, 104, called these pendants drop-shaped, which fails to point to their significance.

³ Absolute dates for the Uruk period were obtained for Temple C of the Eanna sanctuary, Level IV, on the basis of C-14 results from fragments of wood from the Temple. These dates are 3500–3410 B.C.; 3500–3415 B.C.; 3515–3390 B.C. This information is cited from R. M. Boehmer, “14C—Daten aus Uruk und Abydos . . . ,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, xxii, 1991, 223.

⁴ Tests made in July 1992 by E. Bleibtreu and H. Blessing in a modern potter's shop.

⁵ For this suggestion, see D. O. Edzard in *Archiv für Orientforschung*, xix, 1959–60, 24. (I owe this reference to Professor David I. Marcus.)

⁶ For the origin of the stones from which the vessels were made, see A. Schüller, “Die Rohstoffe der Steingefäße der Sumerer aus der archaischen Siedlung bei Uruk-Warka,” *XIX Vorläufiger Bericht . . . in Uruk-Warka*, Berlin, 1963, 56–58.

⁷ For the commodities exchanged, see G. Algaze, *The Uruk World System: The Dynamic Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization*, Chicago, 1993, 74–84; M. Lebeau, “Esquisse d'une histoire de la Haute Mésopotamie au début de l'Âge de Bronze,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, lxxx, 2, 1990, 241–296.

⁸ The level in which the cylinder was found had not been recognized as belonging to the middle Uruk period by the excavator, H. Lenzen, but see Porada, review of M. A. Brandes, *Siegel-Abrollungen aus den archaischen Bauschichten in Uruk-Warka* in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, ciii, 2, 1983, 477, left col.



1 Cylinder seal shape,
Morgan 399

Soon after the appearance of the Uruk type there was a division in the designs on cylinders between those with simple subjects that continued to be primarily engraved with a bow drill (Fig. 7), and those in which careful work with a graver created rounded and even modeled forms depicting ritual and narrative scenes (Figs. 8–10). The types probably served different purposes. Simple subjects, like a row of women making pots (Fig. 7), were perhaps carved on the seal of the overseer of the manufacture of pots or other objects. Impressions of such seals were found not on tablets but on clay lumps that covered the mouths of jars or other containers. Sealings on tablets display ritual and other scenes with distinctive sets of figures and symbols, elements carefully executed with a graver that often eliminated the traces of the drill with which the main forms were indicated. On this type of Uruk period cylinder, ca. 3500–3200 B.C., Mesopotamian art in miniature was developed and lasted for three thousand years. Human figures are represented with natural proportions and articulated well. The artist's visual approach is evident in the seal design of Figure 8 in which the outline of the boat hides the feet of the main figure and in Figure 9 those of the minor figure in the boat. However, the artist's rendering of human forms and proportions represents more than mere observation. Indeed, it expresses man's awareness of himself as a dominant element in nature.

In order to create a scene like that in Figure 8 on a cylinder seal the artist had to carve the figure into the curving plane of the cylinder. He probably conceived a form and engraved the figure as if from its inside out, so that his negative carving would produce a convincing positive image in the impression.⁹ It is likely that the artist worked more by touch than by sight, using his eyes only to examine the results in trial impressions.

⁹ I base these inferences on the experience I had in carving seals made possible by Mrs. Beth Sutherland, a seal engraver and the author of *The Romance of Seals and Engraved Gems*, New York, 1965.

In the structure of people's life of the Uruk period organized religion played an important part. Its pictorial record is seen in cylinder seals that show temples and ritual performed by the representative of the community, a ruler or priest or, more likely, a person who combined both functions (Figs. 8 and 9) and for whom the Mesopotamians used the term *e n*.

The *e n*, the large male figure in the center of the boat in Figure 8, wears a headband and a skirt with a criss-cross pattern, which was carved after the lower body was indicated. This distinctive attire characterizes the *e n*, who also occurs as a dominant figure in battle scenes and as a successful killer of lions. In such scenes his skirt is plain. In Figure 7 the man's function is surely ritual, for the altar borne by a bull that stands before him is topped by the symbols of Inanna, the Sumerian mother goddess, daughter of the sky god Anu.

A second Uruk period cylinder (Fig. 9) has in its center a temple toward which three men walk from the right, while from the left a man approaches in ritual nudity, in a boat that has at its bow and stern two plant designs that may form the sign for *e n*.¹⁰ The temple façade is ornamented by the Egyptian design of twinned papyrus blossoms. The relation of the ornament to an Egyptian prototype seen on the palace façade pictured on the stele of king Uadji (Fig. 10) was recognized by W. B. Emery, but he did not realize that Figure 9 is the only Mesopotamian example of the ornament known at present.¹¹

A third cylinder (Fig. 11) has human figures active in what may be a temple workshop for leather objects, judging by the boot recognizable on the floor of one of the two rooms. The rooms are framed by composite creatures, leonine monsters with entwined serpent necks. This type of monster had no direct successors after the Uruk period,¹² whereas other monsters, like the lion-headed eagle, survived in artworks until the end of the Akkad period, about 2150 B.C. This indicates that some monsters originated in the Uruk period and confirms F. A. M. Wiggermann's suggestion that "monsters belong to the language of art and are novelties depending on regular artistic activity and the development of style."¹³

The characteristic form of the "serpo-felines" of Figure 11 is shared by monsters on Egyptian slate palettes,¹⁴ a fact that contributed to the interest of early twentieth-century schol-

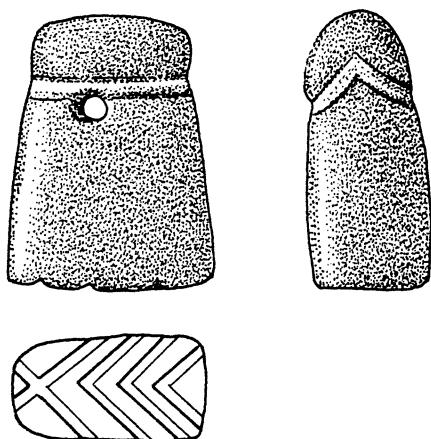
¹⁰ This suggestion was made by E. Strommenger, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia*, New York, 1964, 384.

¹¹ W. B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, London, repr. 1967, fig. 100, "The Palace façade on the stele of Uadji" (here Fig. 10). Recently M. S. Dammerji drew attention to the relation of the ornament to Egyptian prototypes of a later period in *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, xxii, 1991, 277. The early Mesopotamian occurrence of the motif shows that it must have been created earlier in Egypt before it was "exported" to Mesopotamia.

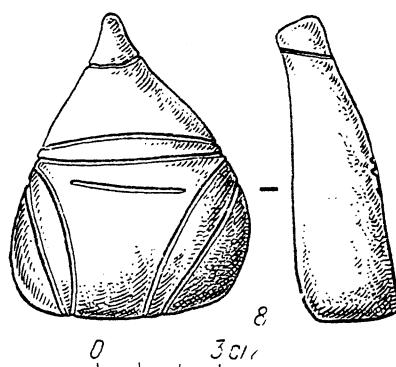
¹² F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts (Cuneiform Monographs*, i), Groningen, 1992, 188, considers the snake-necked monsters as the forerunners of the Babylonian snake dragon. An intermediate form, dated later by about a millennium and a half, may have been the snake dragon of the god Tishpak of Eshnunna; see Wiggermann, "Tišpak, His Seal and the Dragon Mušhuššu," in *To the Euphrates and Beyond, Archaeological Studies in Honor of M. N. van Loon*, Rotterdam, 1989, 117–133.

¹³ Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits* (as in n. 12), 148.

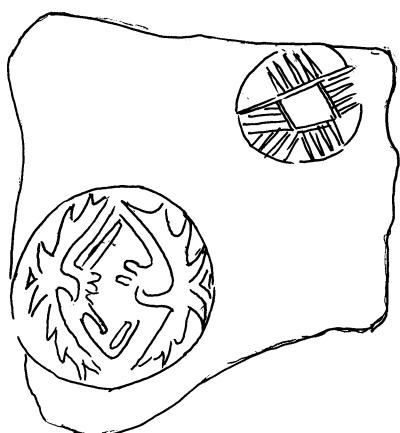
¹⁴ Serpo-felines occur on the small Hierakonpolis palette; H. J. Kantor, "Egypt," in *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, xiv, 1974, pl. 209, and on the Narmer Palette; Emery (as in n. 11), pl. 3 (a).



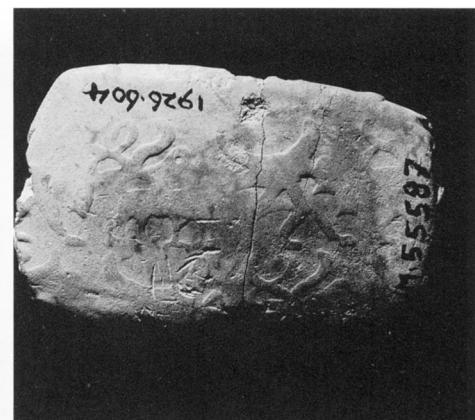
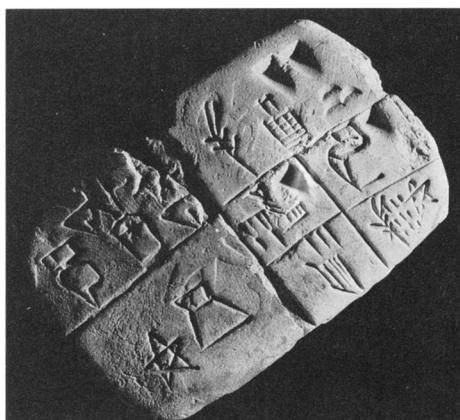
2 Neolithic stamp seal from Tell Bouqras, Syria (after A. von Wickele, *Prähistorische Stempelglyptik in Vorderasien*, Munich, 1990, on unnumbered pl. No. 4)



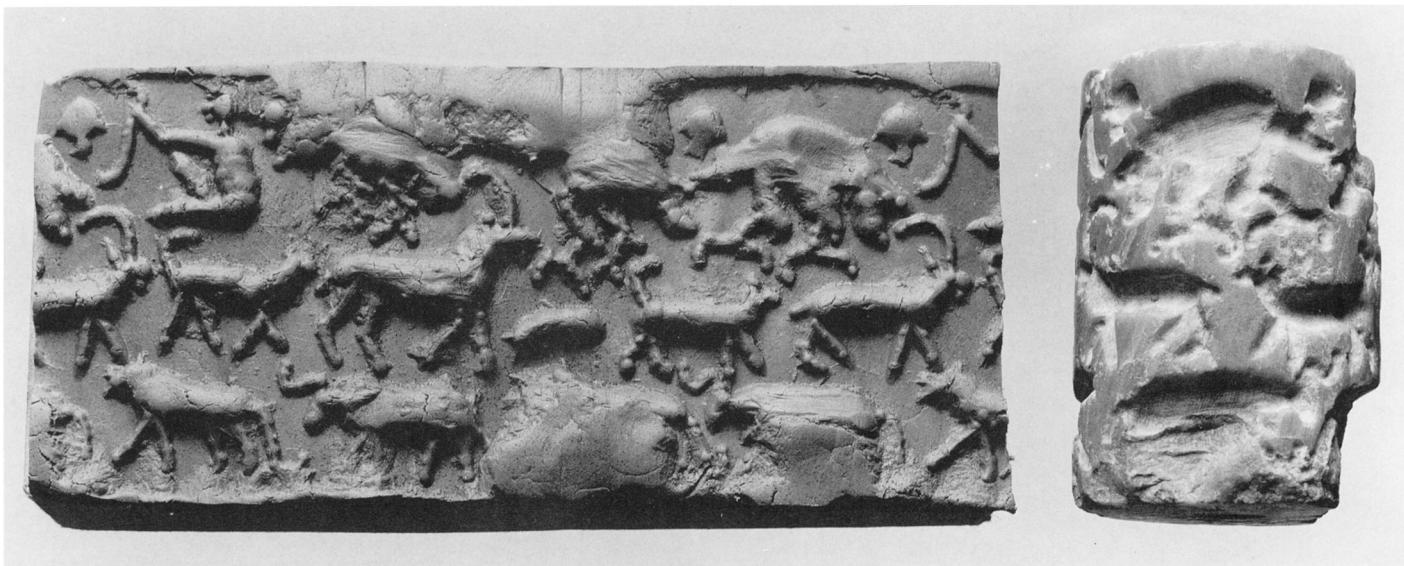
3a–b Clay figurine of abbreviated body of a woman; pendant showing abbreviated body of a woman, both from Yarim Tepe, northwest Iraq. Halaf period, ca. 5000–4500 B.C. (after R. M. Munchaev and N. J. Merpert, *Earliest Agricultural Settlements of Northern Mesopotamia*, Moscow, 1981, 205, fig. 64; 213, fig. 71)



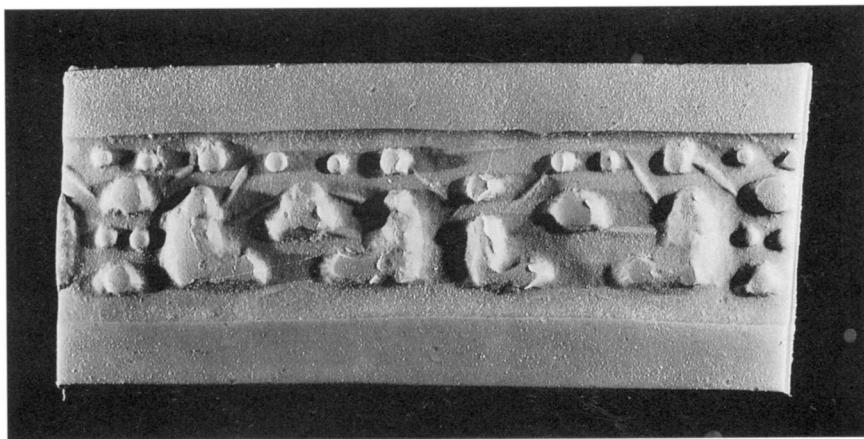
4 Stamp seal impressions on a lump of clay, from Susa A, Ubaid period, ca. 4000–3500 B.C. (after P. Amiet, *Glyptique susienne [Mémoires de la délégation archéologique en Iran, XLIII]*, Paris, 1972, pl. 46: 161, 164)



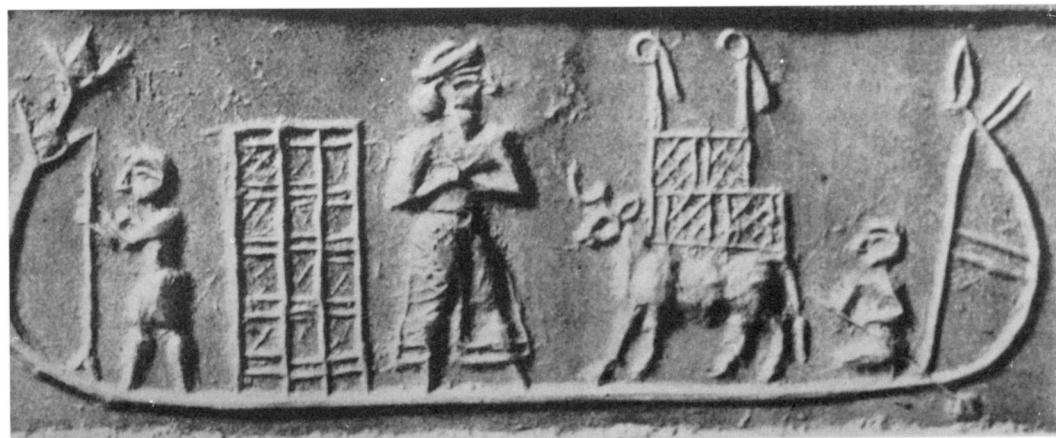
5a–b Cylinder seal impressions on a tablet (after H. Nissen, *Frihe Schrift . . . im alten Vorderen Orient [Ausstellung und Katalog]*, Berlin, 1990, 41, 42)



6 Cylinder seal from Uruk Warka, South Iraq, probably Middle Uruk period, ca. 3500 B.C. (courtesy Eva Strommenger)



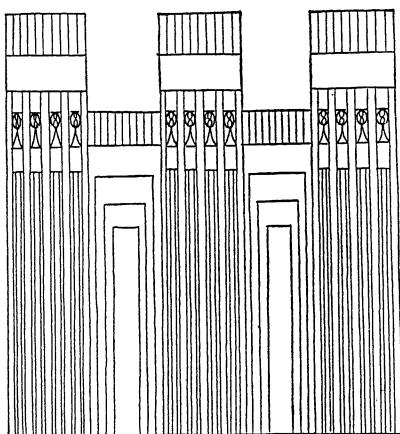
7 Cylinder seal, seated pigtailed figures with pots, from Nippur, Uruk period (courtesy H. P. Hansen)



8 Cylinder seal, ruler in a boat, from Uruk Warka, ca. 3200 B.C. (after E. Strommenger, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia*, New York, 1964, pl. 17, 3rd row)

9 Cylinder seal, a temple approached by worshippers, from Tell Billa, ca. 3200 B.C. (after Strommenger, pl. 17, 2nd row)

10 Palace façade on the stele of Uadji, drawing (after W. B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, London, repr. 1967, 178, fig. 100)

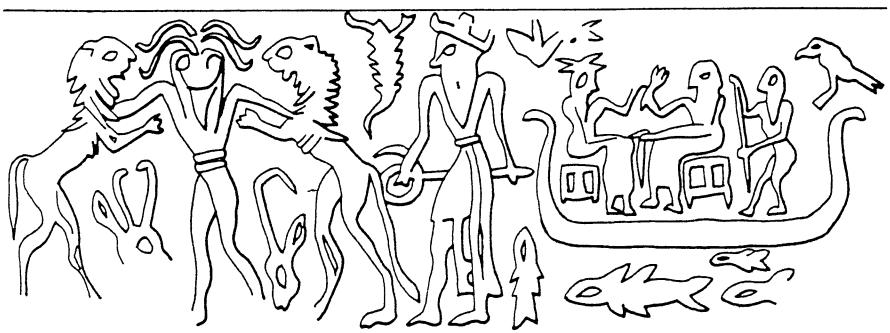




11 Cylinder seal, leather workers in a temple, ca. 3200 B.C., *Morgan 1*



12 Drawing of a seal impression from Fara, contest frieze, ca. 2700 B.C. (after H. P. Martin, *Fara, a Reconstruction of the Ancient Mesopotamian City of Shuruppak, ca. 2700 B.C.*, Birmingham, 1988, 249, No. 256)



13 Drawing of a seal impression from Fara: contest, boat scene, and banquet, ca. 2700 B.C. (after Martin, 278, No. 554)

ars in late fourth-millennium B.C. relations between Western Asia and Egypt.¹⁵ These studies have been given new impetus by the finds of Buto in the Delta made by the German Archaeological Institute in 1986 and 1987.¹⁶

The early international relations that are evident in the mutual influence of Egyptian and Western Asiatic artifacts were greatly reduced in the following centuries, ca. 2900–2400 B.C., a period that modern historians call Early Dynastic in Mesopotamia. During this period Mesopotamian writing became intelligible; the language was Sumerian, an agglutinative language of unknown origin. The role of cylinder seals seems to have been largely that of tools of administration, as seen in part in the relative uniformity of the subjects represented: friezes of struggling animals and heroes (Fig. 12) and banqueting scenes (Fig. 13).

Figure 12 shows creatures called bull-men that have human heads and upper bodies but bull's horns and lower bodies. They are fighting lions that are attacking goats, all in an elegant style dated about 2600 B.C. Eighty-seven impressions have been found of the same cylinder seal. While the use of fifteen of these impressions could not be identified, seventy-two were from door pegs. This indicates that the owner of the seal was a man of authority who had an important role in opening and closing doors, perhaps of a single storage room.¹⁷

Another cylinder of the same style shows beside the contest motif the figure of a god as well as a combined boating and banquet scene (Fig. 13). The nine impressions of the cylinder include five door pegs and three container sealings, according to R. J. Matthews, "one each from a split-reed matting bundle, a wooden box, and a leather bag. The official in possession of this seal had some involvement in the movement of sealed goods as well as in the control of access to

¹⁵ For example, L. W. King, *Egypt and Western Asia in the Light of Recent Discoveries*, London, 1907.

¹⁶ T. von der Way, "Tell el Fara'in—Buto, 2. Bericht," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts in Kairo*, XLIII, 1987, 142–257. See also P. R. S. Moorey, "From Gulf to Delta in the Fourth Millennium B.C.E.: The Syrian Connection," *Festschrift for Ruth Amiran, Eretz Israel*, XXI, 1990, 62–69.

¹⁷ The information concerning the use of the cylinder is derived from the article by R. J. Matthews, "Fragments of Officialdom from Fara," *Iraq*, LIII, 1991, 1–15.



14 Kneeling fragmentary male figure of arsenical copper, from Bassetki, north Iraq, ca. 2250 B.C. (after *Sumer*, xxxii, 1976, 63–76, and W. Farber, *Orientalia*, lii, 1983, 67–72)



15 Cylinder seal from Ur, Akkade period style, mythological scene, ca. 2250 B.C. (after C. L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II: The Royal Cemetery*, London-Philadelphia, 1934, pl. 215, No. 364, U.9750)

storage space."¹⁸ The boating scene of the cylinder evokes life on the canals of southern Mesopotamia.

In about 2340 B.C. King Sargon, a member of a people speaking a Semitic language, established his rule over Mesopotamia, centering his administration in the town of Akkade, as yet undiscovered. Royal workshops there must have produced both cylinder seals and large sculptures, resulting in the naturalistic style that determined Mesopotamian art until about 1600 B.C. and an iconography whose influence was felt until the end of the Assyro-Babylonian era.

Cylinders and major artworks are closely related in style, as

evident in the fragmentary figure in arsenical copper found at Bassetki in northern Mesopotamia (Fig. 14) with an inscription naming Sargon's grandson, King Naram Sin (2254–2223 B.C.), which may be compared with the impression of a cylinder from Ur (Fig. 15). In the cylinder the figure kneeling on one knee holds a gatepost of the abode of Ea, the god of water, wisdom, and magic.¹⁹ This god's home was thought to be at the bottom of the freshwater ocean below the earth, the *abzu*. The fragmentary individual in Figure 14 can be reconstructed from the person with a gatepost in the small cylinder seal. Whether this and other narrative scenes on seals may be miniatures of large wall paintings, or, as Henri Frankfort believed, the seal cutters were the most creative artists of their time and inspired artists of larger works²⁰ remains to be determined.

The profile head of the figure with a gatepost in Figure 15 is rare. More common is a frontal view, as in Figure 16, where the two identical figures, who are slightly taller than the other persons in the scene, have masklike faces framed by six

¹⁸ The figure from Bassetki was published in *Sumer*, xxxii, 1976, 63–76, and discussed by W. Farber, *Orientalia*, lii, 1983, 67–72. The cylinder seal from Ur was published by C. L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II: The Royal Cemetery*, London-Philadelphia, 1934, pl. 215: No. 364, U.9750. For the iconography of the cylinder, see my article, "Notes on the Sargonid Cylinder Seal, Ur 364," *Iraq*, xxii, 1960, 116–123.

²⁰ "It may be true that elsewhere glyptic art reflects the great works of contemporary sculpture and painting, but in Mesopotamia the situation is reversed. From Early Dynastic times decorative art in all its branches utilised the inventions of the seal cutters"; H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals, A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, London, 1939, 308.



16 Cylinder seal, water god with adjuncts, Akkade period style, ca. 2250 B.C., *Morgan 202*



17 Pairs of contestants, Akkade period style, ca. 2250 B.C., *Morgan 159*

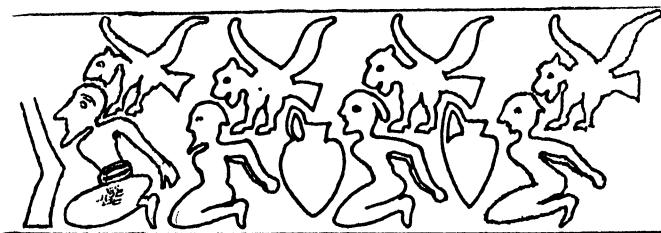


18 The sun god rising, Akkade period style, ca. 2250 B.C., *Morgan 178*



19 Storm god and rain goddess, Akkade period style, ca. 2250 B.C., *Morgan* 220

20 Reconstructed drawing of a seal impression from Uruk, ca. 3200 B.C. (after M. A. Brandes, *Siegelabrollungen aus den archaischen Bauschichten in Uruk-Warka [Freiburger altorientalische Studien, III]*, 1979, pl. 12)



curls, adding to their powerful appearance. The single bearded hero was called *lahmu*, the hairy one, apparently on the basis of his coiffure of characteristic curls.²¹ In early representations of the nude bearded hero,²² however, the hair is not a specific feature and the figure may have borne a different name, corresponding to his heroic character as a victor over lions or other great animals. The tradition of that aspect of the hero appears in contest scenes of the Akkade period where the figure frequently occurs as an opponent of a water buffalo (Fig. 17), opposite a second pair in which a bull-man wrestles with a lion. The bull-man was called *kusarikku*.²³ The precise meaning of these figures and of their battle with the great animals is not yet known.

In contrast with the contest scenes, the narrative scenes of the Akkade period featuring Mesopotamian gods are more intelligible because they reflect some of the characterizations provided in hymns and other texts. Thus the door of Heaven and the bolt of Heaven described in a sunset prayer to the

sun god²⁴ are seen on Akkadian cylinders (Fig. 18). Many of the scenes involving gods show some form of contest in which the principal god is the victor. Even Figure 18, where the sun god rises over mountains between the opened gate of Heaven, may show a defeated enemy in the figure of the god on the right who holds his mace behind his body. The purpose of most of the seal designs therefore appears to have been a glorification of the gods represented. Even the development of the extraordinarily fine style of engraving may have been intended to contribute to the rendering of the deities' dignity and beauty.

In addition to many new emblems for the gods, such as rays for the sun god and other deities, Akkadian artists created new monsters and further developed the artistic forms of those devised earlier. An example is the lion-griffin that appears as the draft animal of the storm god and his consort, the rain goddess (Fig. 19). The earliest form of the creature composed of a lion and an eagle is the lion-headed eagle seen on a seal impression of the Uruk period on which several such creatures soar above a row of prisoners in a scene that surely symbolizes a victory (Fig. 20). However, the name of the monster in later texts, *dim-dugud mushen*, means a thunder cloud in the form of a bird,²⁵ referring to a phenomenon in nature. In the representation of the Akkadian cylinders (the example in Figure 19 is one of several), the four-legged lion-griffin was split off, as it were, from the lion-headed eagle and has assumed an atmospheric symbol-

²¹ See Wiggermann, 1992 (as in n. 12), s.v. *lahmu*.

²² For example, on the stand from Tell Agrab; see H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 4th rev. ed., Baltimore, 1969, pl. 6(C), ca. 3000 B.C. For later renderings of the nude bearded hero, see my article "On the Origins of Aquarius" in *Language, Literature and History... Presented to Erica Reiner (American Oriental Society)*, New Haven, 1987, 279–301.

²³ The identification of the figure representing a bull or bison man with this name is relatively recent, and some unanswered questions are left by the extensive article by R. de J. Ellis "An Old Babylonian *kusarikku* . . .," in *DUMU-E-DUB-BA-A, Studies in Honor of Ake W. Sjöberg (Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund, XI)*, Philadelphia, 1989, 121–135.

²⁴ Wolfgang Heimpel pointed to this correspondence in "The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, XXXVIII, 2, 1986, 130.

²⁵ The drawing is reconstructed from seal impressions from Uruk, ca. 3200 B.C., after M. A. Brandes, *Siegelabrollungen aus den archaischen Bauschichten in Uruk-Warka [Freiburger altorientalische Studien, III]*, 1979, pl. 12. See also T. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. W. L. Moran (*Harvard Semitic Series, XXI*), 1970, 339, n. 27.



21 Presentation to a god, style of the Third Dynasty of Ur, ca. 2112–2004 B.C., *Morgan* 277



22 Presentation to the deified king Ibisin, style of the Third Dynasty of Ur, ca. 2112–2004 B.C., *Morgan* 292

ism that may actually have been the earliest meaning of the monster. Again we encounter a survival in a later period of a much earlier meaning of an image in art. Such interweaving of meanings belonging to different periods contributes to the difficulty of understanding Mesopotamian iconography of a given period.

After the fall of the Akkadian dynasty and the establishment of the Third Dynasty of Ur in 2112 B.C., mythology disappeared from the cylinder seals, most of which show the presentation of a worshipper, presumably the seal owner, to a seated deity or an enthroned king (Figs. 21 and 22). By having himself presented in prayerful attitude before his god, the seal owner may have felt that he could be assured of the god's friendly attention. The seal designs portraying the seal owner before the ruling, deified king may have also shared that same general idea, but the new scheme of what has been called the "royal presentation scene"²⁶ implied that the far more specific confirmation of the office was entrusted

to the seal owner by the king.²⁷ In both cases the seal design seems to have been centered more on the seal owner than on mythological events occurring outside his experience.

The personal concerns of the seal owner in relation to the gods with whom he (or she) wished to be closely connected are most clearly revealed in the cylinders of the Old Babylonian period, which I date here from the Fall of Ur in 2004 B.C. to the conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Murshilish in 1595 B.C. In these cylinders, the identifying inscription naming the seal owner and his father also names the deity of whom the seal owner considered himself a devotee. In Old Babylonian cylinders, the deity represented in the seal designs often differs from the one mentioned in the inscription. Dominique Collon has defined this practice well by stating that, "The Old Babylonian seal owner generally seems to have hedged his bets and to have invoked, both pictorially and verbally, as many temporal and divine powers as possible within the limits imposed by a cylinder seal's surface."²⁸ Several different subjects were represented on the cylinders of this period,²⁹ of which I will mention a few major gods and specifically Old Babylonian figures.

²⁶ Quoted from I. J. Winter, "The King and the Cup: Iconography of the Royal Presentation Scene on Ur III Seals," *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, XXI, 1986, 265.

²⁷ For the significance of the cylinders with this theme, see also I. J. Winter, "Legitimation and Authority through Image and Legend. Seals Belonging to Officials in the Administrative Bureaucracy of the Ur III State," in *The Organization of Power*, ed. McG. Gibson and R. D. Biggs (*Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization*, XLVI), 1987, 1991, 59–99.

²⁸ D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals III: Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian Periods*, London, 1986, 24.

²⁹ In the book by Dominique Collon cited in n. 28, the cylinders are arranged according to principal subjects.



23 Presentation of a sacrificial animal to the sun god, Old Babylonian style, ca. 1900–1750 B.C., Morgan 399



24 A suppliant goddess (the good L a m m a) and a figure with a mace (the good U d u g) before the war goddess Ishtar, Old Babylonian style, ca. 1900–1750 B.C., Morgan 371

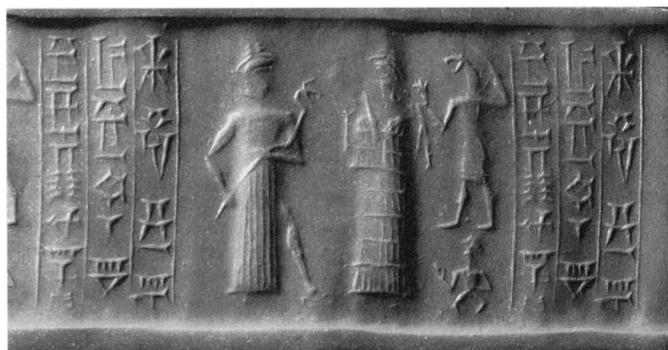


25 The war goddess Ishtar, Akkade period style, ca. 2250 B.C. (courtesy Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Museum A 27903)

In contrast to the Ur III presentation scenes of the seal owner before an unidentified deity, the scenes of Old Babylonian style (Figs. 23, 24, and 26–29) show major deities identified by their attributes, like the rays of the sun god, and certain examples represent in the place of the seal owner himself a king in Babylonian ceremonial robes (Fig. 23) or a figure in a warrior's garment carrying a mace (Fig. 24), which

Dominique Collon and earlier myself have identified as a king. Wiggermann, however, calls the figure the good U d u g,³⁰ a beneficial demon, with whom he associates the suppliant goddess pictured in these scenes, the good

³⁰ F. A. M. Wiggermann, "The Staff of Ninšubura," *Jaarbericht, ex oriente lux*, xxix, Leiden, 1987, 23ff.



26 Nergal, god of war, pestilence, and death, Old Babylonian style, ca. 1900–1750 B.C., *Morgan* 380



28 Storm god on a bull holding his lightning fork, accompanied by a nude female, Late Old Babylonian style, ca. 1750–1600 B.C., *Morgan* 510

L a m m a.³¹ According to Babylonian texts, these two figures were to accompany a person as protectors through life. Often associated with the two figures was a nude female (Fig. 29) who Wiggermann thinks represents a concept of personal happiness, for which the term *bashtu* is translated as “dignity.”³² The appearance of the nude female in combination with other figures, however, like the war god (Fig. 27) or the storm god (Fig. 28), suggests that her meaning may have varied according to the accompanying figures. The meaning of the small filler motifs in Old Babylonian cylinders is largely unknown.

The major deity most frequently represented in catalogues of Old Babylonian cylinders is the sun god Shamash, shown ascending with his saw with which he cuts decisions. In the cylinder, Figure 23, which can be assigned to a workshop in the town of Sippar, on the basis of style, he was given the stature, beard, and multiple-flounced garment of a supremely dignified male figure. Not only was he the preserver of law and justice in the courts, a role important to every active citizen, but texts concerning Shamash indicate that he



27 War god (Nergal?) facing a nude female; lion menacing a seated goat, possibly representing constellations, Old Babylonian style, ca. 1900–1750 B.C., *Morgan* 367



29 Nude female, figure with a mace (the good U d u g), and the suppliant goddess (the good L a m m a), Old Babylonian style, ca. 1800–1700 B.C., *Morgan* 477

was believed to have traits of kindness and helpfulness to man.³³

In the seal impressions of early Old Babylonian tablets in the British Museum³⁴ Ishtar as goddess of war (Fig. 24) and other war gods are as frequently depicted as the Old Babylonian representations of Shamash. Like the representations of the sun god, the Old Babylonian representations of the war goddess are derived from Akkadian prototypes. In a lively earlier Akkadian portrayal the lion pulls furiously to free himself of the goddess’s restraint and weapons sprout from her shoulders (Fig. 25), whereas in the Old Babylonian cylinder (Fig. 24) only the foreparts of the lion are executed and the goddess carries arrows protruding from quivers slung over her shoulders. A more schematic and factual Babylonian image has replaced the imaginative Akkadian representation.

³³ W. Summerfeld stated that the traits of kindness and helpfulness ascribed to Marduk in the Kassite period had been inherited from Shamash, the god favored in the Old Babylonian period; see “Der Aufstieg Marduks,” *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, CCXIII, 1982, esp. 123.

³⁴ F. Blocher, *Siegelabrollungen auf frühbabylonischen Tontafeln im British Museum (Münchener vorderasiatische Studien)*, ed. Barthel Hrouda, x, 1992, 117–119 (warlike deities) and 119 (Shamash).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26ff.

³² *Ibid.*, 28.



30 Impression of the cylinder of Kuk-Simut, chancellor of Idadu II of Elam, ca. 20th century B.C. (after P. Amiet, *L'Age des échanges inter-iraniens 3500–1700 av. J.-C.*, Paris, 1986, 276, No. 83)



32 Presentation of a worshipper to an enthroned god; in secondary motif, men and serpent; bull-god statue with a bird on its back above a lion, Old Assyrian style of the Anatolian merchant colonies, ca. 1920–1840 B.C., Morgan 848



31 Cylinder of Ebarat II, ca. 20th century B.C. (after W. G. Lambert, *Iraq*, xli, 1979, pl. v: No. 42)



33 Contest scene, Provincial Babylonian style, ca. 1850–1780 B.C., Morgan 880



34 Gods and animals, top of the cylinder broken off in antiquity, Anatolian style, ca. 1920–1840 B.C., Morgan 894

Other Old Babylonian representations of major gods are rare, such as Nergal, god of war, pestilence, and death, shown in Figure 26 with one of his lion-headed demons and the suppliant goddess who addresses her prayer on behalf of the god's devotee. In the later part of the Dynasty the storm god on a bull holding a lightning fork (Fig. 28) was taken over in Babylonia from western concepts and representa-

tions of the weather god. A more occasional figure was the god of the herders, Amurru, whose emblem was the crook of the exorcist (seen as a filler motif in the field of Fig. 27). Old Babylonian cylinders survive in greater numbers than those of any other period and they served to spread some features of Babylonian iconography throughout Western Asia.

Another aspect of Old Babylonian thought may be repre-



35 Syrian king before an enthroned god, Classic Syrian style, ca. 1850–1750 B.C., Morgan 910

sented by the enigmatic pair of figures in Figure 27, a goat seated in a human posture on a knoll and menaced by a lion griffin or lion. These figures, found in Old Babylonian contest scenes but not before, probably had a special meaning derived from the juxtaposition in the sky of the star picture of the goat, a representative of Gula, the goddess of healing, and of the monster with open mouth, a minion of Nergal.³⁵ Such an association with constellations is possible in this period of intellectual advances when scientific observations of the Venus star were first recorded.³⁶

The period between about 2000 and 1600 B.C. saw the extension of Babylonian thought and art in cylinder seals to Iran in the east, where the western Old Elamite style showed aspects of Babylonian influence, as seen in the impression of a cylinder of the Elamite official Kuk-Simut, chancellor of Idadu II (twentieth century B.C.) receiving from his ruler a symbol of authority (Fig. 30).³⁷ The eastern Old Elamite style (Fig. 31) meanwhile had developed a distinctive iconography in which the king and his consort play a role showing them endowed with extraordinary powers.³⁸ In Anatolia, an Old Babylonian style sparked an Old Assyrian idiom (Fig. 32), a provincial Babylonian response (Fig. 33), and an important

local style (Fig. 34).³⁹ In Syria, Babylonian and Egyptian influences merged in seals that are often exceptionally beautiful (Fig. 35).⁴⁰ In the tablets of the Assyrian merchant colonies of Anatolia, the role of cylinders is well documented. Occasionally there is evidence that they had a high price. Most important is what we learn about their legal and administrative significance. The contents of a sealed tablet often determined the fortunes of an Assyrian merchant.

The military expeditions of Hittite kings in the seventeenth century B.C. ushered in a time of insecurity and destruction detrimental to the trade relations that had produced the wide distribution of the use of cylinder seals and their styles. During the sixteenth and early fifteenth centuries the development of seal styles in the various regions is uncertain.

New styles emerged in the international age, from the fifteenth to the thirteenth century B.C. They were led in part by the Amarna style of Egypt, which may be credited with awakening a naturalistic tendency in Babylonian art during the Kassite dynasty⁴¹ when there was a regular correspondence between the courts of Babylonia and Egypt. Kassite cylinder seals differ from Old Babylonian ones, though there

³⁵ C. B. F. Walker and H. Hunger, "Zwölfmaldrei," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin*, cix, 1977, 30–31, ll. 26–27.

³⁶ E. Reiner in collaboration with D. Pingree, *The Venus Tablet of Ammisaduga* (*Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, ii, Fasc. 1), Malibu, 1975, 9f.

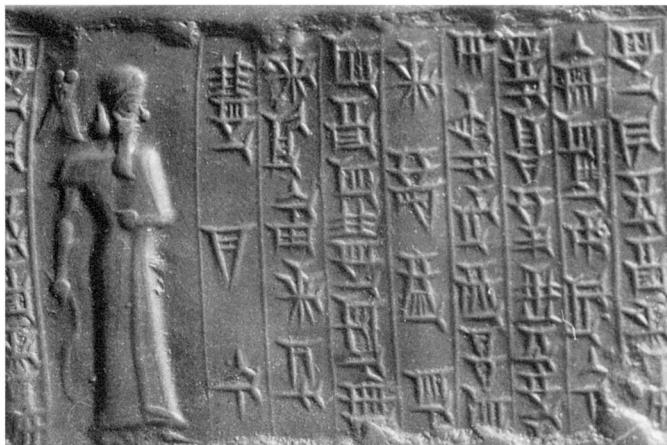
³⁷ Drawing reproduced from P. Amiet, *L'Âge des échanges interiraniens 3500–1700 ap. J.-C.*, Éd. Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1986, 276, No. 83. For comments on the scene, see Amiet, 149.

³⁸ The cylinder of Ebarat II, published by W. G. Lambert, *Iraq*, xli, 1979, pl. v: No. 42, here reproduced in a photograph, courtesy of The Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art, University of Durham, is the most important of the eastern Old Elamite cylinders. For a study of the iconography of Old Elamite seals, see E. Porada, "More Seals of the Time of the Sukkalmah," in *Revue d'Assyriologie*, lxxxiv, 1990, 171–177. For the Old Elamite seal styles, see U. Seidl, "Altelamische Siegel," in *Contribution à l'histoire de l'Iran: Mélanges offerts à Jean Perrot*, ed. F. Vallat, Éd. Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris, 1990, 129–135. A comprehensive study of the glyptic of the Kaftari period by H. Pittmann is in manuscript.

³⁹ Recent work on the style and iconography of the glyptic of the Old Assyrian colonies was done by N. W. Leinwand, "A Study of Anatolian Weathergods of the Old Assyrian Colony Period," Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1984; and *idem*, "Regional Characteristics in the Styles and Iconography of the Seal Impressions of Level II at Kültepe" in *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society*, xxii, 1993, 141–172. See also Nimet Özgüc, "Bullae from Kültepe" in *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East, Studies in Honor of Tahsin Özgüc*, ed. Kutlu Emre et al., Ankara, 1989, 377–405.

⁴⁰ Dissertations by B. A. Porter on "The Old Syrian Popular Style Cylinders (Early Middle Bronze Age)" and by B. Teissier on "Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals in the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1920–1550 B.C.)," Columbia University and Oxford University, are still in manuscript.

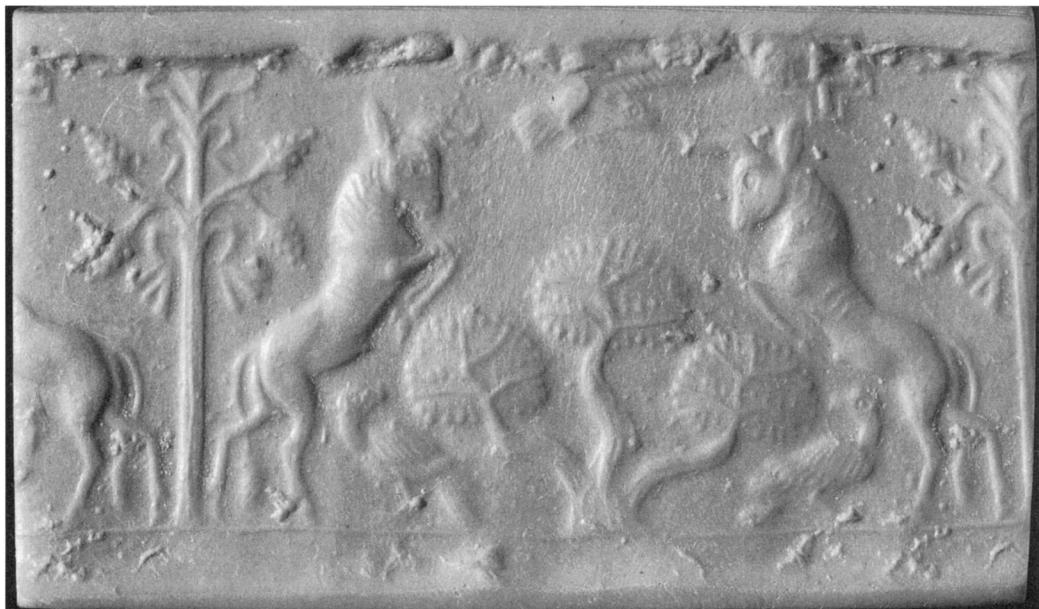
⁴¹ Examples are the naturalistic terracotta sculptures found at the Kassite residence of Aqar-Quf, repr. in Frankfort (as in n. 22), pl. 70: B, C.



36 Kassite god, invocation to Nergal in the inscription, First Kassite Group, ca. 14th century B.C., Morgan 571



37 God with water courses and mountains, Second Kassite Group, reign of Burna-buriash, 1359–1333 B.C., Thebes, Greece



38 Sacred tree flanked by bulls, Second Kassite Group, ca. 13th century B.C. London, British Museum, Southesk Collection, 129547

are transitional pieces.⁴² A cylinder of the first Kassite style (Fig. 36) has a long inscription containing a prayer, manifesting the amuletic character of the seal stone. This type of cylinder shows only one or two figures, of which one is a god, rarely identified by attributes. The second figure, if present, is an unidentified worshipper, perhaps the king. The second Kassite style is characterized by the appearance of elements of nature in the seal designs' depiction of mountains, animals, and flowers.⁴³ These seals often show what seems to be a cosmic image. At the center of the scene is a major deity growing out of a mountain and associated with streams of water (Fig. 37). A sacred tree with numerous branches and

scrolls may also form the center (Fig. 38). Naturalistically sculptured animals and human or superhuman figures like fishmen are symmetrically arranged at the sides of the tree or god. Very little is known about the meaning of the designs beyond their obviously propitious significance.

In the Mitannian Empire of northern Mesopotamia and northern Syria two major seal styles existed, one on faience, often covered with a blue glaze, which I have called the Common style.⁴⁴ The seals generally show simple figures of worshippers and gods around a bouquet-shaped tree (Fig. 39),⁴⁵ or rows of animals, birds, or fish.

Seals carved on hard stone constitute a second Mitannian

⁴² The analysis of Kassite and contemporary Middle Assyrian glyptic by D. M. Matthews in *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium B.C.* (*Orbis biblicus et orientalis, series archaeologica*, viii, 1991), establishes a new level of the study of cylinder seals.

⁴³ The numbering of the styles is due to T. Beran, "Die babylonische Glyptik der Kassitenzeit," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, xviii, 1957–58, 255–278. Additional work published by Matthews is *The Kassite Glyptic of Nippur* (*Orbis biblicus et orientalis*, cxvi), 1992, and "Middle Assyrian Seal Impressions from Tell Billa," *Iraq*, lxi, 1991, 17–42.

⁴⁴ *Seal Impressions of Nuzi* (*American Schools of Oriental Research*, xxiv), 1947, 12.

⁴⁵ For this and other subjects, see my *Seal Impressions of Nuzi* (as in n. 44). More recently see D. L. Stein, "Seal Impressions on Texts from Arrapha and Nuzi in the Yale Babylonian Collection," and "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik," in V. Haas, ed., *Hurriter und Hurritisch* (*Konstanzer Altorientalische Symposien*, ii, 21). The book by D. L. Stein on the sealings in the archive of Prince Shilwa-Teshshup is in press at Harrassowitz.



39 Worshippers with a sacred tree, Common Mitannian style, ca. 14th century B.C. London, British Museum 89420



40 Gods and demons, impression of King Ithi-teshshup's seal, drawing by D. L. Stein (from "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik," in V. Haas, ed., *Hurriter und Hurritisch [Konstanzer altorientalische Symposien]*, n.d.)

style, with a variety of styles and subjects, many of them the same as on the Common style seals. A favored motif is the representation of bird- or animal-headed demons (Fig. 40),⁴⁶ which were probably intended to protect the wearer of the cylinder.

In the fourteenth century a delicate and interesting Middle Assyrian style arose in Assur (Fig. 41)⁴⁷ and developed into

remarkably fine cylinders in the thirteenth century B.C.⁴⁸ Beautiful studies of animals in nature (Fig. 42) were created on cylinder seals, perhaps largely made for the court at Assur and other important centers. The meaning of these exquisite Middle Assyrian cylinders, however, is as yet unknown.⁴⁹

The emergence of the Assyrian Empire in the ninth century B.C. was reflected in a relief style created by the artists

⁴⁶ See my "Remarks on Mitannian (Hurrian) and Middle Assyrian Glyptic art," *Akkadica*, XIII, May-August 1979, 2–15. Monsters and demons abound on the seal impression of King Ithiteshup, drawing by D. L. Stein, in "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik" (as in n. 45), 173–209, here Fig. 40.

⁴⁷ R. Mayer-Opificius, "Bemerkungen zur Mittelassyrischen Glyptik des 13. und 12. Jhdts. v. Chr.," in *Insight through Images (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, XXI), 1986, 161–169.

⁴⁸ For the chronological divisions of the Middle Assyrian style in the 13th century, see D. Matthews, "Middle Assyrian Glyptik from Tell Billia," *Iraq*, LIII, 1991, 17–42.

⁴⁹ See D. Matthews, "The Random Pegasus: Loss of Meaning in Middle Assyrian Seals," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, II, 2, Oct., 1992, 191–210.



41 Hunting scene, Middle Assyrian style, late 14th century B.C., Morgan 600



42 Stag in a landscape, Middle Assyrian style, ca. 13th century B.C., Morgan 601

of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.). Parallel with the relief style was a linear style on cylinder seals of soft stone like steatite or chlorite, which includes scenes of rituals (Fig. 43), hunting, battle, and agriculture (Fig. 44),⁵⁰ in short, a reflection of the main concerns of Assyrian life. Because their impressions rarely appear on tablets, these seals were probably used by average people in Assyria for their propitious value.

Highly placed persons in the Assyrian administration used seals of semiprecious stones representing the great gods and occasionally inscribed with the owner's name and office (Fig. 45).⁵¹ The seals were cut with a drill which engraved the stars

on the headgear and the weapons of the gods: their astral aspects were probably of primary importance to the wearers of such cylinders, for at that time astronomy and astrology played a major role in the country's science and politics. This is the last phase of Mesopotamian cylinder seals in which the designs reflect the main concerns of their wearers.

Contemporary with the Assyrian cylinders of semiprecious stones of the ninth to seventh century B.C., Babylonian cylinders continued to display a more modeled style, one of the finest examples of which is published here (Fig. 46). This cylinder was in the collection of Mossène Foroughi, probably the best connoisseur of Iranian and Mesopotamian glyptic

⁵⁰ E. Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections*, Washington, D.C., 1948, Nos. 610–689; A. Moortgat, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, 1940, Nos. 637–683.

⁵¹ The cylinder, published by Moortgat (as in n. 50), No. 595, was inscribed for Ninurta-bel-usur who was an officer of the year official of 812, Ninurta-ašared, as indicated by R. M. Boehmer in *Propyläen Kunsts*

geschichte, xiv, 1975, pl. 273:a, text p. 355. For a discussion of such cylinders, see K. Watanabe, "Nabû-usalla, Statthalter Sargon's II in Tam(a)nuna," *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, xxiii, 1992, 357–369. For the Neo-Assyrian seals and seal impressions in general, see R. M. Boehmer, "Rollsiegel, Neuassyrisch, spätes 9. Jahrhundert ff." in *Propyläen Kunsts*



43 Ritual meal, Neo-Assyrian linear style, 9th century B.C., Morgan 673

art of his time. It represents a heroic god on a monstrous mount in pursuit of an evil lion-dragon. In a radiant circle behind the god in action is a winged god in what may be a tiered skirt or a bird's tail. This god holds a ring in his lowered hand and a staff in his raised hand. His static figure contrasts with the intensity of the attack by the principal god, which is rendered with extraordinary power. The heroic god's speed is echoed in his flying hair and backward-swinging ax. His horned, lion-headed vehicle is extended like an arrow in the lower field of the cylinder. The arrow on his bow has a flaming point directly aimed at his victim.⁵²

For the dating of the cylinder on the basis of style, the most distinctive feature is the god's mantle, which appears to have been composed of several broad bordered bands.⁵³ The most distinctive representation of this garment is on the cylinder of Urzana of Musasir,⁵⁴ which implies a date before 714, when that king was defeated by Sargon II of Assyria (721–705 B.C.).⁵⁵ The most striking feature of the style is the use of small drillings for patterns and special accents. The patterns appear in the bodies of the monsters and on the god's garment. They stress the centers of the honeycomb pattern on the inside of the god's lower garment and the fringes of the wrapped mantle, as well as what were probably gold appliqués in the border of rectangles in the material of the mantle. The patterns also run as borders on the garment covering the god's breast and form a five-pointed rosette in its center as well as larger rosettes at the top and bottom of the quivers. The rosette that was to decorate the bottom of the quiver on the god's left side is placed symmetrically with



44 Agricultural scene, Neo-Assyrian linear style, ca. 9th century B.C., Morgan 653

the other rosettes, although it thereby sits on the taut string of the bow. The symmetrical placing of the rosettes seems to have been more important than the realistic appearance of the bowstring.

The rosettes may confirm the date in the time of Sargon II, which I implied above on the basis of the type of bordered mantle. In the palace reliefs of Sargon at Khorsabad, his robes are often shown patterned with rosettes.⁵⁶ They are also found on the headgear of human-headed bulls that guarded his palace.⁵⁷ In the Uruk period rosettes were associated with Inanna, the goddess of Uruk.⁵⁸ Perhaps Sargon favored them not only for their decorative value but also for their symbolic significance, which may have remained alive until the first millennium B.C.

The inscription on the cylinder is Neo-Babylonian and reads as follows, in a transcription and translation that I owe to the kindness of Irving Finkel of the British Museum.

Transliteration	Translation
1. ana ^d PA UMUN- <šú>	To Nabû, <his> lord
2. ^{md} PA-KAR-ir	Nabû-ētir
3. A ^{md} IR- ^d ē-a	Son of Warad-Ea
4. LÚ pa-qid KUR.MEŠ	The <i>paqdu</i> of the lands
5. im x ma/ba	...
6. ana DIN ZI.MEŠ- <šú>	Presented (this)
7. BA-šú	For the sake of <his> life.
8. [GAR?]eri ₄ -ba-AMAR.UTU	Belonging to(?) Governor
9. LUGAL	of(?) Eriba-Marduk, the king.

Lines

- 4. *paqdu* (or *pāqidu* or *pāquidu*) said of *matāti* ("the lands") is apparently without parallel.
- 5. This line is written up the side of the seal, and was presumably omitted and added later. This seems the most appropriate place to insert it, but the meaning remains obscure. Kassite seal phraseology might suggest that *im* = *pālihu*, applied to Nabû.
- 8. If the first difficult sign is to be read as GAR one might think of *šá RN*, "property of RN," or *šaknu RN*, "provincial governor of RN" assuming that Nabû-ētir's position altered after the inscription was first cut. The omission of the divine determinative is probably due to space.

⁵² See the drawing by Flandin in P. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria*, Éd. Recherches sur les civilisations, Paris, 1986, pl. 70.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, pl. 140 and her fig. 6.

⁵⁴ E. D. van Buren, "The Rosette in Mesopotamian Art," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XLV, N.F. 11, 1939, 99–107.

⁵⁵ Wittmann, "Babylonische Rollsiegel des 11.–7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, XXIII, 1992, 169–289, lists on p. 205 the parallel examples on cylinders showing heroes wearing this type of garment. The dress was called *Schalgewand No. 1* by B. Hrouda, *Die Kulturgeschichte des assyrischen Flachbildes* (Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, II), 1965, 25ff., to which Wittmann refers on p. 204, n. 183.

⁵⁶ For a good photograph, see R. M. Boehmer, *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, XIV, 1975, pl. 274:e.

⁵⁷ Wittmann (as in n. 53), 205, states that the mantle composed of several bands, as on the cylinder of Urzana of Musasir, was not depicted in Assyrian reliefs before the time of Sargon, a point also made by Hrouda (as in n. 53), 30, pls. 36.3 and 37.1.



45 The god Ninurta pursuing a lion-demon, Neo-Assyrian drilled style, time of Adad-nirari III, 812 B.C. (after A. Moortgat, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel*, Berlin, 1940, No. 595)



46 The god Ninurta pursuing a lion-demon, Neo-Babylonian, late 8th century B.C. Collection Mossène Foroughi

The Neo-Babylonian signs of the inscription confirm the origin of the cylinder in Babylonia. The cylinder is inscribed in mirror writing (as are most inscriptions on Assyrian cylinders of this period), indicating that Figure 46 was a jewel and an amulet rather than a tool for sealing. As for the later addition of the name of the king Eriba Marduk, Dominique Collon first drew my attention to the fact that the Chaldean king Marduk-apal-iddinna (the biblical Merodach-Baladan),

the contemporary and opponent of Sargon II, called Eriba Marduk, dated ca. 775 B.C.,⁵⁹ the one who (re)established the foundations of the land. It is possible, therefore, that the king's name was added to our cylinder in the time of

⁵⁹ For this date, see J. A. Brinkman, "A Legal Text from the Reign of Eriba-Marduk (ca. 775 B.C.)" in *DUMU-E-DUB-BA-A* (as in n. 23), 37.



47 Relief from the Ninurta temple of Ashurnasirpal II, 883–859 B.C. (after A. H. Layard, *Monuments of Nineveh*, London, 1849, pl. 5)

Merodach-Baladan. This would confirm the date of the Foroughi cylinder in the time of Sargon II, which I suggested above on the basis of stylistic criteria.

The subject of the cylinder and a characterization of the Babylonian style in contrast to that of Assyrian versions of the same subject still need to be discussed. The heroic god of the cylinder is doubtless Ninurta, an ancient Mesopotamian god of war and agricultural fertility.⁶⁰ In the first millennium B.C. his warlike nature was his most characteristic trait. The Assyrian kings were devoted to the cult of Ninurta, who they believed would help them against their enemies. At his new capital, Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) built a temple to Ninurta adjacent to the ziggurat, which may also have been dedicated to this god. The scene carved on stone relief slabs in the main doorway of the temple (Fig. 47)⁶¹ represents, uniquely in Assyrian monumental art, a mythological scene: Ninurta's defeat of either the Asakku (*Asag*) demon or the Anzu bird (*Imdugud*).⁶² The subject was also represented on a cylinder seal found at Assur (Fig. 45) cited above, dated about 812 B.C.⁶³

⁶⁰ J. Black and A. Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, London, British Museum, 1992, 142–143.

⁶¹ The drawing of the relief was published by A. H. Layard, *Monuments of Nineveh*, London, 1849, pl. 5. The position of the relief can be seen in the plan reproduced by U. Moortgat, "Ein Kultbild Ninurtas . . .," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, xxxv, 1988, 119, and in her reproduction, p. 121, of Layard's drawing of entrance 2 of the temple.

⁶² For comments on the Anzu bird, see most recently W. L. Moran, "Notes on Anzu," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, xxxv, 1988, 24–29. For the Asakku demon, see Black and Green (as in n. 60), 35–36; see also F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Babylonian Prophylactic Figures: The Ritual Texts*, Amsterdam, 1986, 275, 276, 277.

⁶³ See above n. 51 with a reference to R. M. Boehmer, "Glyptik von der alt-bis zur spätbabylonischen Zeit," *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, xiv, 1975, 355, s.v. 273:a. Boehmer's date can be supported by the stylistic relation

In both cylinders (Figs. 45–46) the main characters are the same: the armed god, with his bow drawn, advances on his bull-horned mount, which has a partly leonine body, wings, bird claws, and a scorpion's tail. Both gods menace the fleeing lion-dragon, who turns his head back toward his attacker.

Each lion-dragon is characterized as an evil being by an upright, pointed ear⁶⁴ which is shared with such awful creatures as the baby-snatching female demon Lamashtu. The dragons' heads and forepaws are those of a lion, while the rest of their bodies and their great wings are those of an eagle, as seen on the mount of the storm god of the Akkade period, Figure 19.

The difference between the Assyrian and Babylonian styles of the cylinders lies in the postures of the figures, which are static in the Assyrian version and dramatically violent in the Babylonian one. In the latter the god's step is gigantic, the energy of spanning the bow made credible by the extension of the bow's curve, in contrast with the calm semicircle described by the bow of the Assyrian version. Finally the fleeing dragon of the Assyrian design stands on the ground whereas the Babylonian is trying to escape in the air. Words, however, can scarcely render the fury that seems to animate the Babylonian god's pursuit. At the end of the ancient Mesopotamian era a Babylonian artist was able to create real drama and great art in the carving of this small cylinder seal.

to a cylinder from the reign of Adad Nirari III (810–783 B.C.) in the collection of Jonathan P. Rosen, to be published in the *Festschrift* for Ruth Opificius. The stylistic evidence counters the doubts about the early date of the cylinder from Assur expressed by S. Herbdorff in *Neu-assyrische Glyptik des 8.–7. Jh.v. Chr.* (*State Archives of Assyria Studies*, 1, University of Helsinki), Helsinki, 1992, 6.

⁶⁴ Moortgat (as in n. 61) draws attention to the upright pointed ear of the evil Anzu, 125, n. 36.

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